

**BOTTOM**

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20 MAR 1964  
CE

Dr. W. O. Baker  
President's Foreign Intelligence  
Advisory Board  
The White House  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Dr. Baker:

Enclosed herewith is a memorandum recording my recollection of various points which were made during our conversation of 2 March 1964 concerning the National Reconnaissance Organisation. Please let me know if you think that there is anything which I have overlooked or misstated.

Sincerely,

(Signed) JOHN A. MCCONE

John A. McCone  
Director

**Attachment**

NIPE:JABROSS:ag (19/3/64)

Note on orig by JAM:

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Sorry for the delay but as you know I left for SVN shortly after our meeting and failed to put this memo in final form before departure.

EXECUTIVE REGISTRY  
ROOM 7-E-12

cc: Mr. Coyne w/o att.

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**MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD**

**SUBJECT: The National Reconnaissance Organization**

1. During a conversation with Dr. Baker and Mr. Coyne on 2 March 1964, I reviewed some of the conclusions which I have reached about the NRO.

2. I began by pointing out that the jurisdictional battle and the bureaucratic infighting that has more and more come to characterize the conduct of the national reconnaissance program in recent months can no longer be tolerated. The essential nature of this program with respect to our national security is entirely obvious; it is too important to permit of any dilution or misdirection of effort attributable to organizational clashes.

3. I particularly stressed the thought that it is conceptually wrong to regard the NRO as a line organization. As originally created, it was my concept that the NRO should be a management organization making maximum use of the resources of the Department of Defense and the CIA, and allocating responsibilities between agencies as appropriate. I expressed the view that what appears to be the existing concept which involves a line organization run by the Under Secretary of the Air Force, outside of existing DoD channels, is organizationally unsound. I said that in my opinion we should get back to the original concept.

4. A number of points were developed as follows:

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a. The assets under the general aegis of the NRO are national intelligence assets. The Director of Central Intelligence is the principal intelligence officer for the President and as such he cannot abrogate his responsibility for insuring that these national assets are directly and immediately responsive to the intelligence direction of the United States Intelligence Board. Neither the Secretary of Defense or other top executives in the Department of Defense have, or can have, a primary interest in intelligence matters. Only the DCI carries this unique responsibility.

b. An example of the necessity for keeping these programs under close intelligence direction is a situation which developed last summer involving lack of responsiveness on the part of the NRO to intelligence requirements. This came about when CORONAs were scheduled by the NRO all through the good-weather months, on research and development flights, to the exclusion of flights which would produce intelligence essential to the preparation of national estimates on Soviet military capabilities. It was only through strenuous effort on the part of the USIB that the schedule was amended to provide at least one intelligence flight per month.

c. The flexibility and the opportunity for the exercise of initiative which the CIA enjoys -- to a considerable extent because of certain statutory exemptions from normal government procedures -- are essential to proper conduct of a reconnaissance program. There is nothing theoretical about this view. It is amply bolstered by examples from the history of the U-2 and of reconnaissance satellites. Examples which illustrate this point are:

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(1) The Air Force's initial rejection of the U-2 the Air Force rejection of the improved J-75 engine, with the result that during the Cuban crisis the Air Force version was not operationally up to the task, the much delayed adoption by the Air Force of an inflight refueling capability, pioneered by CIA, the development by CIA, against very strong military opposition, of a carrier-based U-2 capability which may well prove essential from a political point of view; and the CIA installation of electronic countermeasures equipment on the U-2, which the Air Force has not done, raising the distinct possibility that in such a future situation as Cuban control of SAMs, the Air Force will once again have to turn to CIA for adequate aircraft.

(2) The early insistence within the military establishment on a read-out capability for reconnaissance satellites (i.e., the SAMOS concept). If this concept had prevailed as the only U. S. capability, the SAMOS failure would have left us with no such asset. The CIA assumption of responsibility on a covert basis for recoverable CORONA satellites, assured the capability which we now enjoy.

These examples are not intended in any way to detract from the essential role that the Air Force must play in overhead reconnaissance; nor are they intended as invidious criticism. The Air Force must, of course, look primarily to operational considerations and -- particularly in the case of the U-2 -- these considerations preclude full exploitation of the vehicle for intelligence purposes. The point is that intelligence is the primary consideration of CIA and this fact, coupled with the flexibility it enjoys, makes it possible for that agency to do things that the defense establishment finds difficult if not impossible.

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I might add that this fact has been emphasized by the presidents of the various contracting organizations which have contributed so much to all of these programs.

d. The CIA -- perhaps because of the flexible nature of its organization, the fact that its primary business is intelligence, and the security discipline of its personnel -- has been able to develop and operate large complex programs with absolute secrecy. The nature of the defense establishment makes it extremely difficult for it to operate with the same degree of security. Secretary McNamara has made this point in connection with the OXCART development.

e. Finally, the operational use of reconnaissance aircraft involves a high degree of political sophistication. The risks of exacerbating international tensions by ill-considered or hasty operational procedure are obvious. There are long-established mechanisms for thorough, yet entirely covert, coordination between CIA and the responsible political authorities on matters of this kind. Military organization does not lend itself to this sort of operation.

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5. I concluded by pointing out that we are coming to a critical period in the satellite reconnaissance field. It is now evident that Soviet technological advances have made the OXCART

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an unreliable vehicle for primary reconnaissance over the USSR -- purely apart from political inhibitions on using it for this purpose. This makes it all the more necessary to proceed with the utmost vigor and imagination to perfect existing satellite systems and to develop alternatives for the future. In this connection, the possibility of Soviet development of an anti-satellite capability makes the matter even more urgent.

6. Dr. Baker expressed his interest in the various points outlined above and asked me to present my views at a meeting of the full board scheduled for April 2nd or 3rd. In the meantime, he said that there would be another meeting of his panel on March 10. In view of the fact that I would be absent from town at that time, it was agreed that the panel would hear from General Carter, Dr. Wheelon and others.

JOHN A. McCONE  
Director

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